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And worship Allah
and associate naught with Him
The Holy Qur'an 4:37

Jihad

Question of Suffering

Worship of God

\$2

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The Muslim Sunrise

A Journal of the Islamic Renaissance in America

The Muslim Sunrise is a journal of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, Inc., U.S.A. The magazine is open for discussions on Islam and topics relating to other religions. It highlights the role of Islam in a changing environment. It provides a platform for public opinion on current issues and their solutions. Opinions expressed in the magazine may not necessarily be those of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam.

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The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was founded in 1889 by *Hadrat* Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian (1835-1908), peace be on him. It is presently headed by *Hadrat* Mirza Tahir Ahmad, the fourth successor to the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya community, may Allah be his support.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the US is headed by *Sahibzadah* Mirza Muzaffar Ahmad, known as M.M. Ahmad with respect to his prominent services in the financial arena in the government of Pakistan and at the World Bank.

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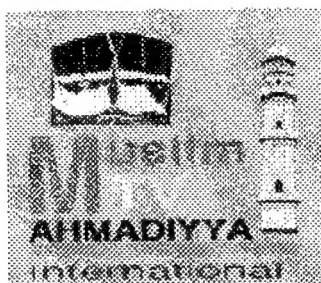
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our soul seeks a union with its Creator. It is only when we are placed in a state of humility, prayer and charity that we can achieve a realization of our nature, our relationship with the brotherhood of man and our place in the cosmos.

For the emergence of a progressive, just and benign society Islam teaches the maintenance of laws that ensure equal freedom to all so that every one will have equal opportunity to develop his own relationship with God and be a productive member of society to the best of his ability.

Righteous Beliefs And Deeds:

In the Qur'an the words righteous beliefs and righteous deeds often appear together. Righteous beliefs without righteous deeds performed to support them are empty beliefs and carry no meaning. As Hadrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Promised Messiah, has pointed out, faith is related to righteous deeds as a garden is related to the water of a river. The Qur'an says:

(2:26) Give glad tidings to those who believe and perform righteous deeds. For them are gardens beneath which rivers flow.

Thus if we profess faith in God and His Messenger but do not perform righteous deeds in the service of mankind, individually as Ahmadis and collectively as Ahmadiyya Community, our faith and our beliefs have no meaning. Worship of Allah is not limited to *saum-o-salat* and *dhikr*. Indeed *saum-o-salat* form only the first step in the concept of worship. Each aspect of our life is only one aspect of a completely integrated religious life. We cannot be viewed as worshipping God if we concentrate on one aspect while ignoring the other aspects of divine worship.

God is supreme and perfect. God's universe is complete and perfect. Man has been created in the best mould (*ahsan-i-taqwim*). The Qur'an is a complete and perfect book for us to follow. It deals with every aspect of life. None of its verses, whether they deal with manners, moral quality, mercy, fasting, prayer and charity, are more important, or less important than the others. The life of the Holy Prophet, Muhammad, is complete and perfect and all aspects of his life, like the seven colors of a spectrum required for the emission of light, or *nūr*, are of equal importance for us to study and emulate.

The Qur'an commands us to devote every aspect of our life to the task of achieving the goal God set for us at creation, individually as well as collectively. To quote from the Qur'an,

(6:163) Say, my prayer, my sacrifice, my living and my dying are wholly for Allah, the Lord of mankind.

The three aspects of worship are:

- (1) worship, the object of which is to build a personal bond between our soul and Allah, or *ta'alluq billah*.
- (2) worship, the object of which is to achieve perfection of our physical and intellectual states so that we may serve mankind at the highest level, that is, physical, moral as well as intellectual,
- (3) worship, the object of which is to serve mankind, to promote unity among mankind, to establish an equitable and just society and to develop a benign economic system.

The physical aspects include the achievement of the best standard of social behavior, manner of standing and sitting, dress code, social etiquette, manner of speech, mode of living, table manners and every other form of personal conduct which brings distinction to our personality.

For the intellectual progress the Qur'an teaches acquisition of knowledge of the universe of creation, every moment of our waking hours, (3:192) *standing, sitting and while lying on our sides*. There are more than 700 verses in the Qur'an which bring to our attention myriad subjects for study and research. Each verse, in its ultimate objective, is an injunction for Muslims to acquire knowledge of God's universe so that they may understand how high they have to ascend to achieve the goal God set for them at creation.

To establish our personal relationship with God, or *ta'alluq billah*, Islam prescribes five daily prayers (*salat*), a month of daily fasting (*saum*), charity (*zakat, sadaqa*), Hajj, sacrifice and the practice of remembering God (*dhikr*) at all times, so that we may keep in mind our ultimate goal in life.

The acts of prayer and fasting form a conscious attempt on our part in which we place our body and soul in a state of humility and supplication. It is only when we have placed ourselves in this state that

(95:5) Surely, We (that is, God) have created man in the best mould (ahsan-i-taqwīm).

The universe of creation, made perfect in every respect, has been created to serve and submit to mankind. In the language of science, the universe supports and sustains mankind and man has been granted the ability to make use of everything in the universe to achieve his goal, that is, to become God's *khalifa*, that is, His representative on Earth.

There is nothing in the universe that has not been created to serve mankind. This theme is repeated several times in the Qur'an. For example;

(45:14) And He has subjected to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth; all from Him. In that, surely, there are signs for a people who reflect.

Having been so endowed with the elements of divine qualities man is then commanded to rise from his humble origin (*salsāl*, or clay) to become God's representative on Earth, by making a covenant with Him, by worshipping Him through prayer, fasting, charity and righteous deeds, by engaging in scientific study of God's universe of creation, by serving mankind with his own effort, by employing the faculties God perfected in him and by developing the elements of divine qualities God breathed into him.

In the sphere of human behavior, there are two alternative ways, from which we can choose, in the exercise of our creative faculty. Both are human attempts in which the soul expresses itself but the two ways lead in opposite directions.

The first is a passive attempt which consists in a renunciation, or a state of abandonment, in which the soul is permitted to wander in the belief that by giving free rein to its own intuition it will find its own communion with the mysterious God and will receive back His blessings.

The active alternative is a conscious attempt at self-determination in which the soul sublimates baser passions in the belief that the created universe presents a challenge for creativity. Therefore, to gain mastery over the inner self is the only way that can be taken to exercise the creative faculty toward the goal of attaining human perfection and mastery over the external world.

The first alternative, or the passive response, is common to many religions and is indicative of a sense of sin. The second alternative, or the active response symbolizes the basic principle of Islamic worship of God. The active response demands the transfiguration of human personality. It symbolizes an awakening to a sense of unity of the body and soul, which deepens as our efforts broaden and our vision expands to the unity of mankind to embrace the Unity of God.

The allegory about Adam's creation narrated in the Qur'an highlights the duality of man's nature. Man is a reflection of God's attributes to whom angels (that is, the universe) are commanded to submit. However, his fiery nature embodies baser passions, symbolized by *Iblīs*, which do not submit to man unless he strives to become God's chosen servant.

The concept of God's worship therefore embodies two opposing aspects. Man must continuously sublimate his baser passions on the one hand and continuously strive every waking hour of his life to develop divine attributes in himself to raise his physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual stature on the other. Each aspect of the struggle is endless and each aspect is as important as the other.

A Muslim's goal in life is not just salvation from sins but rather perfection of divine qualities in him in practical life. Peace of mind and heart is not the ultimate objective of worship of God. Peace is an immediate requirement in a Muslim's ceaseless quest for his ultimate objective in life.

Stages of Human Perfection:

The struggle for human progress to perfection has three distinct stages, or aspects, namely; (1) the physical and intellectual stage, (2) the moral stage and finally (3) the spiritual stage. The three stages are the stages of the transfiguration of human personality from the lowest to the highest stage of human perfection where man becomes the perfect embodiment of divine attributes.

As pointed out by Hadrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Promised Messiah, the Qur'an describes these three stages as,

- (1) (12:54) *Nafs-i-ammara*, that is the stage in which the spirit is prone to err, or the state in which we are most willing to team and understand.

In the allegory about the creation of Adam related in the Qur'an in several Chapters, God creates man from dry wringing clay, or *salsāl*, fashions him in perfection and then breathes into him His own spirit, that is, man is granted the gift of soul, the bearer of the elements of divine qualities.

This reasoning leads us to the recognition of a bond between man who embodies the elements of a vast number of attributes and his creator Who embodies them at infinite level. If the divine attributes exist and if we can observe, understand and prove their operation in the universe to ourselves then we have indeed proved the existence and identity of our Lord Who embodies them.

Thus our understanding of the identity of God is contained within the bounds of our consciousness, our knowledge, our vision, our feelings and our capacity to comprehend, both the rational and the irrational, in us. As the limits of our knowledge and our vision expand our comprehension of the identity of God grows with them. The Qur'an repeatedly mentions the righteous believers as being those who "understand," those who have "knowledge," those who possess "intelligence."

That part of knowledge which we have achieved and absorbed is finite. It leads us to the understanding of divine qualities which pervade the universe and thereby God's identity. The extent of knowledge which has not been acquired is infinite. It represents the ultimate challenge to mankind. It provides the stimulus for all human progress and growth of our civilization.

It is with the power of consciousness that we establish for ourselves the identity of our Lord Who creates, evolves and governs the end of all things. It is through the sensitivity of our soul that we seek to establish our relationship with Him, or *ta'alluq billah*, by developing divine attributes within us, that is, by worshipping Him in every aspect and in every sphere of our lives.

Worship of God:

Like the concept of God, or Divine Unity, the concept of worshipping God in Islam, is a rational concept. To worship God, who is the embodiment of infinite qualities and ultimate goodness means to become, in mortal and human sense, His image, that is, a perfect man.

The Qur'an says,

(51:57) I have not created the men and the jinn except that they worship Me,

that is, all mankind, the highest and the lowliest in society, has been created to acquire divine attributes.

Object of Man's Creation:

The object of man's creation and God's eternal relationship with man are described in the allegorical story about Adam in the Qur'an. Narrated in several suras (chapters) this allegory is pivotal to the understanding of the fundamental message of Islam, or worship of God. The historical Adam was the first man capable of receiving divine revelation, the first prophet of God. The allegorical Adam in the Qur'an is mankind.

Man was created from the soil of the earth, or *salsal*, both literally and metaphorically to become God's *khalifa*, or His representative on Earth. From creation to the state where he became a fully developed human being, he is made to pass through stages of evolution. God fashions him in perfection and then breathes His own spirit into him. God then commands angels, or the cosmic agencies, that is, the universe, made angelic to man, to fall down in submission to him. They all do, but *Iblīs*, or the rebellious part of man's nature and the forces that defy human progress, does not.

The Qur'an says:

(18:38) ... dost thou disbelieve in Him Who created thee first from dust, then from a sperm drop, then fashioned thee into a (complete, or perfect) man?

And again,

(32:8 to 10) He has made perfect everything that He has created. And He began the creation of man from clay.

Then He made his progeny from an extract of insignificant fluid.

Then He endowed him with perfect faculties and breathed into him His own spirit."

And again the Qur'an says,

Scientific discoveries and advances made in cosmology have confirmed the Qur'anic teaching that the universe was created from a singularity, or from nothing. Before the beginning of creation, before the Big Bang cosmic event and before the creation of sub-atomic particles, gravity and electromagnetic force, there existed an all-encompassing reality, or an infinite being, who embodied infinite qualities which are essential for the initiation of creation and the process of evolution of the universe.

The Qur'an recognizes this eternal Supreme Being as (14:11) *the Originator of the heaven and the earth*, or Allah. His laws governed a long process of evolution which ultimately produced man whose personality bears every element, cell and characteristic of the universe. His laws govern the laws of Nature. He gives life and He takes it away.

Thus our reasoning demands, though it does not prove itself alone the existence of the eternal Supreme Being, or Allah. Three questions arise from this course of reasoning.

Firstly, how do we recognize the Creator of the universe?

Secondly, can we mortals realize Him in life?

Thirdly, what is the meaning and object of realizing Him?

The answers to these three fundamental questions form the basis of the concept of worship of God and also summarize the teachings of Islam.

Before seeking answers to these questions we first note that as finite human beings we can identify the infinite God only in finite terms. Then keeping in view the concepts of creation, evolution and end of all things we determine, as the Qur'an repeatedly commands us to do, by observation, scientific study, reflection and reasoning every conceivable quality, or attribute, operating in the universe.

The Qur'an says:

(29:20-21) Travel in the Earth and observe how Allah originated the creation.

Again the Qur'an says:

(3:191,192) In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day there indeed are signs for a people of understanding. Those who

remember Allah (Allah; the embodiment of infinite qualities) standing, sitting and while lying on their sides, and ponder over (that is, study scientifically) the creation of the heavens and the earth.

Every attribute, or quality, that we so determine will have an ultimate limit where our reasoning will come to an end. However, if each of these attributes is expanded to infinity, our reasoning dictates that they converge into one unique infinite attribute which pervades the universe. There cannot be more than one infinity to encompass the universe of creation. Thus infinite love, infinite compassion, infinite justice, infinite knowledge, infinite creativity, infinite power, infinite glory and all other divine attributes whose operation we observe in the universe are one and the same and each attribute, when made infinite, has the same meaning. Thus infinite love or mercy has the same meaning as infinite knowledge or infinite justice. This unique attribute, which encompasses all divine qualities is the quality of being Allah and we identify it as *rabūbiyat*.

The Qur'an says:

(7:157) My (that is, God's) mercy encompasses everything.

In the same vein it is equally correct to say; God's knowledge, or God's power, or God's justice encompasses everything. Thus, the Qur'an says:

(53:43) In your Lord is the ultimate.

This, in essence, is the meaning of the Doctrine of Divine Unity. God is the embodiment of one unique infinite divine attribute. All divine attributes that we identify in operation in the universe are aspects, or manifestations of Divine Unity which we humans can comprehend.

Since the divine qualities that we identify are described in human terms we acknowledge that the elements of these qualities are present within us, or else we could not have recognized them to begin with. The bearer of the elements of divine qualities in us is our soul. The Qur'an identifies soul as the divine impression on the nature of man with which all men are created.

Worship of God

M. M. Mian (*Montreal*)

All great religions in today's world preach worship of God in one form or the other. However, the perception of God, as well as the perception of worship, differ among the followers of great religions. For instance, Christians profess faith in the doctrine of Trinity, that is, God, His only begotten son, and the holy ghost form one godhead. The followers of Judaism believe in the God of Israel Who has made a covenant with only the biological descendants of Jacob, or Israel.

The religion of Islam, as presented to the world by the Ahmadiyya Movement, is the only monotheistic religion, or the religion of Divine Unity, in the true sense of the word. God is the creator of our universe, Lord of all mankind, most Merciful, infinitely Gracious and Master of the Process of Judgment for all, regardless of race or nationality. He is infinite, that is, He is the embodiment of infinite divine attributes and each of His attributes is infinite. He is eternal, that is, each of His divine attributes is eternal. He listens to our prayers. He reveals Himself to those who seek Him. God does not have a physical body. He has no begotten sons. He does not foster a special relationship with the biological children of anyone. God has no partners in divinity.

Unlike today's organized religions, Islam is a non-ecclesiastic religion. There exists neither a church, nor a synod of religious councils, to administer religion to the followers of Islam. There are, of course, some who are more learned in religious matters than others. The religion of Islam does not teach, nor does it encourage, the practice of beliefs which cannot be judged on a universally acceptable standard of reasoning.

The message of Islam is particularly addressed to the individual human being who is the unit and the builder of the family and the Islamic society. The status of the individual in society is determined by his personal righteousness and his contribution to society's development and not by his ancestry. Our righteous fathers will not intercede on our behalf in heaven, nor will anyone else, and no one can redeem us from our sins. There are no human saviors and redeemers in Islam. A nominal membership in a Muslim community alone does not guarantee righteousness in the eyes of God. Each Ahmadi Muslim, whether he is Ahmadi by choice or whether he has been raised in an

Ahmadi household, must strive himself for salvation from sins and the purification of his soul. Each of us must strive himself/herself for righteousness, that is, the perfection of divine qualities in his/her own personality.

The message of Islam can be summed up in two words, “worship God,” or worship Allah and none but Allah. The Qur’an teaches nothing but the worship of God in every aspect of life. The entire life of the Holy Prophet is a demonstration of the worship of God as preached by the Qur’an. Our declaration of faith, or our Creed (*shahada*)—“No God But Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”—sums up the message of Islam, that is, worship Allah in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet, for he was the best exemplar of the perfection of divine qualities in man. All prophets in history, from Adam to Jesus Christ, taught nothing but the worship of God to their people. The Promised Messiah came in our age to strengthen our faith in the majesty of Allah (*haqqul-yaqīn*), and revive the message of worship of God.

Perception of God:

The Islamic perception of God, or Allah, is supported by rational thinking, which we can comprehend by observing, by reasoning and by studying scientifically the operation of our universe. Islam does not support any dogmatic beliefs, or “belief systems,” and has no room for polemics and myths in its message. The teachings of the Qur’an are supported by reasoning and rational thinking and they appeal to both our mind and our heart.

To understand the Islamic perception of God, we first note that we inhabit a world which is in a process of evolution and that as human beings we took no part in its creation and we share no control over its operation. We observe that there are in existence complex laws which govern the operation of the universe. Also, we note that if this universe is evolving in accordance with scientific laws then it must have had a beginning, or an origin, or a source of creation. Secondly, if the universe is evolving then it is bound to have an end, or it will initiate a new beginning. As well, our reasoning dictates that there cannot be more than one origin of creation, since all origins must have had, in turn, their origin.

cannot perceive themselves at a disadvantage either. There are two different worlds, different faculties, different requirements and different aspirations — if aspirations could be attributed to worms at all!

Thus this imbalance does not suggest that they have been the target of any injustice. Visualize, for instance, the case of a few happy healthy worms. They all seem to be perfectly adjusted to their environment which in turn is well adjusted to them. They are fully content with the faculties they are provided with, and are incapable of yearning for things beyond the scope of their senses. Yet, if a human child were to be offered to exchange his suffering state of life with that of a happy contented worm, would he not rather die than to accept this option of living the lowly existence of a worm?

The very awareness of one's life and the higher status one occupies in the grades of life is sufficient in most cases to offset the disadvantage of suffering. It transpires that suffering is after all a relative state. The source of suffering is embedded in the sense of deprivation. It is the awareness of loss of some familiar cherished values which generate a sense of pain. It can only happen when one has already tasted the pleasure of such values or has observed others enjoying them. The loss of such values once enjoyed or the knowledge of others possessing them, while one cannot, are two powerful factors which generate pain. But the lack of such values, the nature of which one does not perceive cannot cause suffering. What is pain after all, if not mere signals of a variety of losses? Despite the fact that we cannot always relate all our varied encounters with pain to specific bereavements, an in-depth study would always reveal that every sense of pain is inseparably connected with a corresponding sense of loss.

The creation and evolution of sensory organs owe their existence to interminably long encounters with loss or gain. They are the two most potent creative factors created by God. All the five senses which we possess are the products of our awareness of them, as discussed before, which during a billion years of our evolution, gradually materialized into sensory perceptive mechanisms. Suffering and happiness could not by themselves have created the mechanism of consciousness. To register their presence without such mechanisms, they themselves would cease to be. How then can nothingness create anything? Unconsciousness cannot design and create consciousness even in trillions of years. It has to be a conscious Creator to endow death with consciousness and create life out of it. The Most Masterly Creator

seems to have employed pain and pleasure in an, as yet, unknown manner to create the very organs which perceive them. Remove the pain as an instrument in the making of this masterpiece of creative wonder and life will be rendered into a senseless mass of vegetation, not even aware of itself. Are a few odd cases of misery and deprivation too big a price to pay for the prodigious marvel of consciousness?

Let us remind the reader that Islam defines evil only as a shadow created by the lack of light. It is not a positive existence in itself. We can imagine a source of light (a lamp or the sun), but we cannot imagine any object as a source of darkness. The only way in which an object becomes a source of darkness is through its ability to obstruct light. Likewise, it is only the absence of goodness that constitutes evil. The grades of evil are only determined by the opacity of the obstructing medium.

Likewise, it is the awareness of possession which constitutes happiness. Any loss or threat of loss to possession constitutes pain or agony. But they must coexist in an equation of positive and negative poles. Remove one, and the other will disappear. Hence no one on earth can interfere with the creative design of pain, pleasure, goodness and evil and succeed in altering the plan of things. It is beyond the reach of human compassion to efface suffering without effacing life itself.

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should be no problem to be resolved — there should be no question to be answered. They do not owe their existence to any creator, and no creator is accountable before them if they find any distortion in the random unrolling of creation. For every suffering, every misery, every unequal distribution of happiness, nothing but chance is to be blamed and that realization ends the age-old debate. Chance being the creator, or nature, as we may call it, being unconscious, deaf and dumb, blind and chaotic cannot be blamed for any flaw in what is born out of chaos. The outcome of chance, without a creator, has to be blind and disorderly, without reason, without design, without direction.

For those who believe in God, the Creator, there should be no problem either, because they see enough direction, balance and purpose in creation, to submit to the wisdom of the plan in its totality. An odd thorn jutting out here and there from a most artistically arranged, colorful and fragrant bouquet of flowers will not provide sufficient cause for the rejection of the bouquet, or will it?

If the atheist's scepticism is correct, then death seems to be the only solution for the drawn out misery of the innocent sufferers. If the believer's scenario of creation is right, then death again acquires the role of a redeemer, but in a completely different way. For them, death acts only as a gateway to the life after death, which will usher the innocent sufferers into an era of unlimited reward. If they could only dream of what rewards were waiting for them in the Hereafter as compensation for their transient misery on earth, they would smilingly jog along despite suffering as though it were mere pinpricks or an odd thorn on the way to an eternal life of comfort and happiness.

Some people may not accept this and may still insist that they are not satisfied because there is no God and no life of reward or punishment after death. For them there is no value in this answer. If so, then the question should not be discussed at all. The question, they should remember, can only be discussed in relation to the role of God as Creator. The question of morality, the right and wrong of something, arises only with the belief in the existence of God. If there is God, then the suggestion of a possible compensation presented above cannot be dismissed merely with a scornful chuckle. If there is no God, then we cannot blame Him or anyone else for any chance suffering that we may encounter. We must then take life and all that pertains to it merely as an accident without meaning, without direction, without goal. Suffering has to be accepted as a part of nature, as something that cannot be done

away with and cannot be run away from. Either way, one must learn to live with suffering.

Of course, suffering is a vital constituent of the motive force of evolution. However the question of balance between suffering and the pleasure derived from the consciousness of existence, remains to be decided. If, in this simple equation, suffering offsets the deep-rooted satisfaction born out of the awareness of one's existence, then most people would rather die than live to suffer. If most of those who suffer would much rather lose conscious identity of existence than compromise with unhappiness, then the very wisdom of such a plan would be called into question. But that, which we actually observe in real life, is exactly the opposite of what is suggested above. Life dearly clings to the very awareness of its existence, sometimes even at the price of immense misery and unhappiness. That is the predominant rule with minor exceptions too insignificant by comparison.

Again we should remember that the perspective of suffering is variable. It constantly keeps changing when viewed from different angles of observation. Those who are healthy themselves perceive the state of a subnormal child as that of extreme suffering, but those who are placed at an even lower level of deprivation than the subnormal child in question may look up to him with envy.

ON A MUCH WIDER CANVAS, each form of life is either superior or inferior to the forms of life below or above it respectively. Throughout the process of evolution our awareness of values has kept changing as they evolved from lower to higher orders. The stages that occur in the upward spiralling course of evolution, when looked down upon from a higher vantage point, appear to be at a disadvantage. The higher forms of life cling dearly to the greater awareness of values which they have gained over millions of years of evolution. Any reversal or loss of such values and faculties would inevitably result in suffering, which by itself is indispensable for the promotion of the same values. Consider the state of worms in comparison to some higher forms of life, and compare yet again the state of those higher forms of life in comparison to the more advanced animal species placed even higher in the ladder of evolution. They all are certainly not equally gifted. The worms that thrive on the product of organic decay and filth could not by any means perceive themselves to be at par with the freely roaming wild horses, grazing in prairies on tender grass. Yet they

One must not forget that 'cause and effect' is one thing and 'crime and punishment' is quite another, however closely they may seem to resemble each other. It is correct to say that a crime may work as a cause and every punishment that may ensue would be an effect of that causative crime. But it is not correct to claim that every suffering is a punishment of some crime committed before. It is wrong to say that all healthy babies are healthy because they are rewarded for some act of goodness of their parents. So also it is wrong to maintain that every unhealthy baby is punished for an unidentified crime of its parents or forefathers. Health and disease, ability and disability, fortune or misfortune, congenital advantages or disadvantages are themselves but indispensable to the grand scheme of things, in which they play a causative role. They are distinctly apart from the phenomenon of crime and punishment, goodness and reward. As we have discussed above, suffering, like happiness, is an essential prerequisite for life to evolve and in the course of evolution it is not related to the phenomenon of crime and punishment at all. Suffering in its causative role produces a wide spectrum of useful effects which amply justify its existence.

Suffering has been a great teacher, cultivating and culturing our conduct. It develops and refines sensibilities, teaches humility and in more than one way, prepares humans to be able to turn to God. It awakens the need for search and exploration and creates that necessity which is the mother of all inventions. Remove suffering as a causative factor in developing man's potential and the wheel of progress would turn back a hundred thousand times. Man may try his hand at altering the plan of things, but frustration would be all he will achieve. Thus, the question of apportioning blame for the existence of suffering upon the Creator should not arise. Suffering, to play its subtle creative role in the scheme of things, is indeed a blessing in disguise.

The secret of all scientific investigation and discovery lies in a constant quest for the relief of pain and discomfort. The motivation behind scientific exploration and discovery is based less on a desire to gain luxuries than on a need to escape pain. Luxury itself is, after all, a further extension of the same tendency to move away from a state of discomfort to a state of comparative ease.

Let us once again examine the scenario of the 'innocent sufferers', the newborn babies with congenital defects or those falling ill at a later age with typhoid or some other disabling disease, rendering them blind, deaf and dumb, or even partially or totally paralyzed for life. Worse still

may be the case of those, whose central nervous system is damaged by mishaps during birth, resulting in mental disorders. Is the question valid: Why this particular child, A or B? Why not another, say for instance C or D? Would not the same question repeat again and yet again: Why C or D? Why not E or F and so on? The only valid question therefore, would be: Why anyone at all? Hence the only option the Creator is left with is either to create all babies equally healthy or equally unhealthy. This leads us to the realization that the health of a baby itself is merely of relative value. Perhaps it is hard to find any two babies equally gifted with the health of mind and heart and all the physical organs alike. To resolve the question of suffering, there is another valid question to be raised against the Creator. If one child is born with pinhole eyes and a large ugly nose and other disproportionate features, will he not suffer all his life comparing his disadvantages with the advantages of other more fortunate fellow human beings?

Inequality of health and looks will continue to irritate most individuals and will even agonize some at finding themselves to be at a disadvantage in comparison to others. Does it not warrant in the name of absolute justice and fair play that God should create every human exactly alike in health and looks? Widen the area of comparison by bringing into play the faculties of head and heart and disposition and the contrast between those who have advantages and those who have disadvantages will become even more pronounced. In the absence of extreme cases even the mild cases will appear offensive to the sense of justice. One has to begin somewhere to create variety and diversity to break the monotony. Wherever there is variety and diversity, comparative suffering and happiness are bound to be generated. To object against the plan of things in the name of compassion for disabled children is one thing, but to replace the plan with a more just and compassionate viable plan is quite another. One may try one's hand at altering the scheme for aeons of time but one will still not be able to replace the plan of God's creations for a better one. In other words, we shall be again reverting to the question of why any disease and suffering at all: why should they be inevitable? One answer to this question, we have already given above.

LET US EXAMINE the same question from yet another perspective: from the viewpoint of an atheist as well from the viewpoint of a believer in God. For the atheist, strictly logically speaking, there

with no portion of suffering at all. Perhaps then we shall be able to eliminate suffering altogether from afflicting life. There would be absolute equality and everyone would be placed on a level platform, but how and where should we introduce this new scheme? Alas! Wherever we attempt to introduce it in the long chain of evolution, we are bound to come across insurmountable problems. These new rules either have to be introduced at the very beginning of creation or not at all. To apply absolute equality at any following stage would be impossible without creating insoluble contradictions. We shall thus need to return to the point where life started.

We must go back all the way in the history of life; all the way to the very beginning and start to build the ladder of evolution anew, rung by rung. But try as we may, we are bound to get stuck at the very first step, the starting point of life. We would not be able to take a single step forward because an equal distribution of happiness and total absence of suffering would entirely eliminate the impetus for evolution. There would be no struggle for existence, no natural selection, no survival of the fittest. Not a single progressive step would be taken by the first, most rudimentary forms of life.

Picture the stage of life represented by the three earliest life units known to man, i.e., bacteria with nuclei, bacteria without nuclei and pyro-bacteria (born by the energy of fire). In this imaginary system there would be no competition for food or survival, because all are equally provided for; there would be no suffering either. As a consequence, in that hypothetical revised plan of creation, life would certainly remain stationary and stagnant, forever fixed at its earliest rudimentary form. The creation of man would remain a far cry from the point of its ancient beginning. Therefore the real question is whether to choose a system with suffering as its integral part, perpetually spiralling evolution in the greater interest of life, or to abandon the plan altogether for the fear of unavoidable suffering. In the final analysis therefore, the only question we are left with is, 'To be or not to be'?

The rudimentary forms of life, if they had a brain to think, would much rather wish 'not to be' than 'to be' in such meaningless drudgery of existence. Suffering is also associated with the idea of retribution and punishment. Glimpses of retribution can be witnessed in the animal kingdom only in a narrow and limited application. They can be observed in the behaviour of many animals of land, sea and air. Elephants and buffaloes are notorious for their propensity towards

revenge. This gradually developing trait of life is inevitably linked up to the gradual synthesis of choice. To do something or not to do something can either be an intuitive compulsion or a calculated decision of mind. We are not yet certain about how far the element of choice plays a role in animal conduct, but we know that choice begins to play a vital role in the decision-making process of humans. Whether one moves towards light or darkness, towards life or death, is most often a conscious decision on the part of man. If therefore, as a natural consequence of man's wilful actions, a reward is provided or penalty exacted, none else is to be blamed but man himself.

Sometimes people may suffer without realizing that they themselves are to be blamed — that there is a general principle of retribution operative in nature known as nemesis. They may have earned that suffering advertently or inadvertently, without identifying the cause. It is so because every fault does not result in an immediate punitive consequence. It often happens that nature executes justice against transgression imperceptibly.

However this is not the whole problem. It is far too complex, vast and intricate and needs to be further illustrated with the help of specific scientific examples, hypothetical or real. There are some very difficult cases to explain, like those of children born with certain congenital defects. Why are they made to suffer? It cannot be said that it is through any fault of theirs. If there is any fault it might have been of their parents, yet that may not have been intentional on their part. In this context the term "fault" should be understood in its widest application, covering even accidental occurrence of congenital diseases. Such faults are far from being conscious crimes. Whatever the nature of the particular cause of some defect, one thing is certain that the poor innocent child who is born with any disadvantage is not responsible for the cause of this suffering in any way.

The solution to the understanding of this problem lies in the realization that all suffering cannot be categorized as punishment, nor all happiness as reward. There is always a small percentage of individuals who will seem to suffer as though without justification. However, a closer more careful examination of such cases would reveal that there is no question of wilful injustice involved. They are merely an unavoidable by-product of the wide plan of creation, but they also play a meaningful role in the general advancement of human society.

experienced is reduced, its opposite number, the capacity to feel pleasure and happiness, will also be lowered to the same degree. The two seem to participate equally in propelling the wheel of evolution: both possess equal significance. One cannot be done away with alone without the other, thus nullifying the entire creative plan of evolution.

We understand from the Holy Quran, that God did not create suffering as an independent entity in its own right, but only as an indispensable counterpart of pleasure and comfort. The absence of happiness is suffering, which is like its shadow, just as darkness is the shadow cast by the absence of light. If there is life, there has to be death; both are situated at the extreme poles of the same plane, with innumerable grades and shades in between. As we move away from death, we gradually move towards a state of life which is happiness; as we move away from life, we move away with a sense of loss and sorrow towards death. This is the key to understanding the struggle for existence, which in turn leads to a constant improvement in the quality of life and helps it to achieve the ultimate goal of evolution. The principle of the "survival of the fittest" plays an integral role in this grand scheme of evolution.

This phenomenon is mentioned in the Holy Quran in the following verse [67:2-3]: ...

Blessed is He in whose hand is the kingdom, and He has power over all things;

*It is He Who has created death and life that He might try you — which of you is best in deeds; and He is the Mighty, the Most Forgiving.*¹

The answer to the question 'Why is there suffering?' is clearly implied in this verse in its widest application.

The profound philosophy of life and death, the innumerable shades in between, and the role they play in shaping life and improving its quality are all covered in the above verse. It is the very scheme of things that God discloses here. We know that life is only a positive value, and death merely means its absence, and no sharp border exists separating one from the other. It is a gradual process, the way life travels towards death and ebbs out, or from the other direction we view death traveling towards life gaining strength, energy and consciousness as it moves on. This is the grand plan of creation, but why has God

designed it so? *'That He might try you -- which of you is best in deeds'*, is the answer provided by the Holy Quran.

It is the perpetual struggle between life and death that subjects the living to a constant state of trial. so that all who conduct themselves best survive and gain a higher status of existence. Herein lies the philosophy and the machination of evolution as described in the verses above. It is this constant struggle between the forces of life and the forces of death which provide the thrust to the living to perpetually move away from death or towards it. It may result either in the improvement or deterioration in the quality of existence in the wide spectrum of evolutionary changes. This is the essence and spirit of evolution.

Suffering could only be considered objectionable if it were created as an independent entity with no meaningful role to play in the scheme of things. But without the taste of suffering or an awareness of what it means, the feeling of relief and comfort would also vanish. Without an encounter with pain and misery, most certainly, joy and happiness would lose all meaning. Indeed the very existence of life would lose purpose, and the steps of evolution would stop dead in their tracks.

Thus in the evolution of our five senses, the awareness of loss and gain has played an equally essential role like the two wheels of a wagon; remove one, and the other would also lose its meaning. The very concept of the wagon would be grounded. The struggle between life and death, which produces suffering, is also the means of creating pleasure. It is the primary motivating force which fuels the carriage of evolution to move forward eternally.

During the long history of evolution, disease has arisen from various causes, directly or indirectly related to developmental changes. Environmental variations, the struggle for existence, mutations and accidents, have all jointly or severally played their part. Disease, defects and shortcomings all have a role to play in effecting improvement. This is how various animal species went on evolving unconsciously it seems, but certainly with a direction, which appears to follow a consciously designed course towards greater consciousness.

LET US NOW try to conceive another scheme in which the element of suffering is set aside by the application of a hypothetical rule: all forms of life must be equally provided with an equal share of happiness

converts and the Companions of our Holy Prophet had been the fruit of compulsion, it would have been impossible for them to have demonstrated, at the time of trials, such steadfastness and sincerity as only true believers can display. The loyalty and faithfulness of the Companions of our Master, the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) is a fact so well known as need no comment from us. It is no secret that among them are examples of loyalty and steadfastness the parallel of which is difficult to find in the annals of other nations; this body of the faithful did not waver in their loyalty and steadfastness, even under brandishing swords. On the contrary, in the company of their Great and Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, they displayed such steadfastness which no man can demonstrate unless his heart and his bosom are lit up with the light of faith. Hence compulsion had no role to play in Islam. (*Rūhāni Khazā'in Vol 15: Masih Hindustān Maiñ, pp. 11-12*)

None of the true Muslims who ever lived maintained that force should be employed in the spread of Islam. On the other hand, Islam has always flourished on the strength of its inherent qualities of excellence. Those who having the distinction of being called Muslims, yet believe that Islam should be spread with force, do not seem to have any awareness of the inherent beauties of Islam. (*Rūhānī Khazā'in Vol. 15: Tiryāqul-Qulūb, footnote, p. 167*)

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The Question of Suffering

Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad

(May Allah be his support)

Head of the Worldwide Ahmadiyya Community

WHEN WE EXPLORE the history of evolution in search of the causative factors which gave birth to the sensory organs as life evolved, we can safely conclude that right from the beginning they have always been the sense of loss and gain. We identify the journey of evolution to be a long procession of some obscure realization of gains and losses which gradually evolved the sensory organs to register the presence of pleasure and pain, comfort and suffering. If we look back at the lower forms of life, at the first few rungs of the ladder and compare them with the higher forms of life near the top, it is not difficult to recognize that in real terms the evolution is the evolution of consciousness. Life is constantly spiralling up from a lesser state of consciousness to a higher state with continuously sharpening faculties of awareness.

The awareness of gain and loss is rather vague and obscure in the beginning, and we cannot locate a definite seat for this awareness in the anatomy of rudimentary organisms. But we know from their reactions to the surrounding elements and situations that they do possess some defused sense of awareness. It is this diffused inexplicable sense which is employed somehow by the Creator to initiate the sense of perception in life. This sense of perception gradually developed and created its own seats in the organism of life. It is these seats which got precipitated ultimately into what we know now as sensory organs. The creation of the brain was not a separate and unrelated incident. No development of sensory organs could be meaningful without a corresponding development of a central nervous system and a simultaneous evolution of the brain, which could decipher the messages transmitted by the sensory organs. Evidently therefore, the brain developed as an essential counterpart of the system of perception. The more evolved the consciousness becomes, the more intense grows the sense of loss and gain felt by specific nerve centers which translate the awareness of loss as suffering, and gain as pleasure, to the mind through the brain.

The less developed the consciousness, the smaller is the awareness of suffering. The same goes for happiness. Thus, the sensory provisions for the recognition of suffering and happiness are indispensable to each other. It is quite likely that if the level to which suffering can be

In This Issue

Jihad

in the light of the Holy Qur'an
by the Promised Messiah, peace be on him
4-5

Question of Suffering

Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (May Allah be his support)
Head of the Worldwide Ahmadiyya Community
6-16

Worship of God

M. M. Mian
17-29

About Sunrise: 2

Addresses for Contact: 30

Conditions of *Bai'at* (Initiation): 31

Our God: Back Cover

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Guiding Principles of the Holy Qur'an

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

There is no compulsion in religion.

[The Holy Qur'an, 2:257]

Jihad

Iqdrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad (1835-1908),
the Promised Messiah and Mahdi, peace be upon him

Islam never advocated compulsion. If the Holy Qur'an, the books of Hadith and historical records are carefully examined and as far as possible, studied and listened to attentively, one is bound to reach the positive conclusion that the allegation that Islam permitted the use of the sword for the spread of religion is shameless and utterly unfounded. This, in fact, is the view held by only those who have not studied the Holy Qur'an or the Traditions or other reliable sources of Islamic history without prejudice. Not only this but some have even gone to the extent of fabricating lies and levying unfounded charges without inhibition. I know that the time is approaching fast when those who are hungry and thirsty for Truth will see through their deception. Can a religion be described as a religion of compulsion when its Holy Book, the Qur'an, has categorically prohibited the use of force for the spread of faith? So says the Holy Qur'an:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

There is no compulsion in religion.

Can we accuse that great Prophet of using force against others, who, for thirteen years, day and night, exhorted all his Companions in Mecca not to return evil for evil but forbear and forgive? When however, the mischief of the enemy exceeded all limits and when all the various peoples around him made determined efforts to exterminate Islam, God's attribute that He always defends His beloved ones so demanded:

Let those who raised the sword perish by the sword.

Otherwise in no way has the Holy Qur'an permitted compulsion in religion. If compulsion in any way had been employed in winning

Conditions of *Bai'at* (Initiation)

in The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam

by *Iḥdṛat* Mirza Ghulām Ahmad of Qādiān

The Promised Messiah and Mahdī (peace be upon him)

The initiate shall solemnly promise:

I. That he/she shall abstain from *Shirk* (association of any partner with God) right up to the day of his/her death.

II. That he/she shall keep away from falsehood, fornication, adultery, trespasses of the eye, debauchery, dissipation, cruelty, dishonesty, mischief and rebellion; and will not permit himself/herself to be carried away by passions, however strong they may be.

III. That he/she shall regularly offer the five daily prayers in accordance with the commandments of God and the Holy Prophet (*peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*); and shall try his/her best to be regular in offering the Tahajjud (pre-dawn supererogatory Prayers) and invoking *Darūd* (blessings) on the Holy Prophet (*peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*); that he/she shall make it his/her daily routine to ask forgiveness for his/her sins, to remember the bounties of God and to praise and glorify Him.

IV. That under the impulse of any passions, he/she shall cause no harm whatsoever to the creatures of Allah in general, and Muslims in particular, neither by his/her tongue nor by his/her hands nor by any other means.

V. That he/she shall remain faithful to God in all circumstances of life, in sorrow and happiness, adversity and prosperity, in felicity and trials; and shall in all conditions remain resigned to the decree of Allah and keep himself/herself ready to face all kinds of indignities and sufferings in His way and shall never turn away from it at the onslaught of any misfortune; on the contrary, he/she shall march forward.

VI. That he/she shall refrain from following un-Islamic customs and lustful inclinations, and shall completely submit himself/herself to the authority of the Holy Qur'ān; and shall make the Word of God and the Sayings of the Holy Prophet (*peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*) the guiding principles in every walk of his/her life.

VII. That he/she shall entirely give up pride and vanity and shall pass all his/her life in humbleness, cheerfulness, forbearance and meekness.

VIII. That he/she shall hold faith, the honor of faith, and the cause of Islam dearer to him/her than his/her life, wealth, honor, children and all other dear ones.

IX. That he/she shall keep himself/herself occupied in the service of God's creatures for His sake only; and shall endeavor to benefit mankind to the best of his/her God-given abilities and powers.

X. That he/she shall enter into a bond of brotherhood with this humble servant of God, pledging obedience to me in everything good, for the sake of Allah, and remain faithful to it till the day of his/her death; that he/she shall exert such a high devotion in the observance of this bond as is not to be found in any other worldly relationship and connections demanding devoted dutifulness.

(Translated from *Ishtihār Takmil-i-Tabligh*, January 12, 1889)

Our God

Ḥaḍrat Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad (1835-1908),
the Promised Messiah and Mahdi, peace be upon him

Our paradise is in our God. Our highest delight is in our God for we have seen Him. This wealth is worth procuring though one may have to lay down one's life to procure it. This ruby is worth purchasing though one may have to lose one's self to acquire it. O ye, who are bereft, run to this fountain of life that will save you. What shall I do, and by what drum shall I make the announcement that this is your God, so that people might hear? What remedy shall I apply to their ears so that they should listen. If you belong to Allah, rest assured that Allah will indeed belong to you.

(Rūḥānī Khazā'in, Vol. 19, Kashtī Nūḥ, pp. 21-22)

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